

SS. Constantine & Helen
Russian Orthodox Church
Lime Village
Alaska ^{Bethel}

HABS No. AK-89

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

SS. CONSTANTINE AND HELEN RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHAPEL

HABS No. AK-89

Location: Lime Village, on the Stony River, Alaska.

Present Owner: Alaska Diocese, Orthodox Church in America.

Present Occupant: SS. Constantine and Helen Russian Orthodox Chapel.

Present Use: Chapel.

Significance: A number of historic Russian Orthodox churches survive in Alaska, built by Native congregations in traditional forms. An unusual church without an iconostas, SS. Constantine and Helen demonstrates the absolute minimal requirements for a church. Other churches may have begun with this form, and then had sanctuary, iconostas, and vestibule added as the congregation grew.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: It is not clear whether the church was built in the 1920s, with the roof replaced in the 1940s, or whether the church was built in the 1940s. The village was founded in 1917, when the village of Kanillan, located about 20 miles upriver, was destroyed by fire. The villagers moved to this site and rebuilt.
2. Original plans and construction: The church was built as a simple log square, without sanctuary or vestibule. Emma Bobby Alexie remembers helping her father, Paul Bobby, build the church in the 1920s. He rigged a windlass to lift logs from the river up to the site of the church. Other villagers assert that the church was built in the 1940s.
3. Alterations and additions: A ca. 1943 photograph (see III.A. below) shows the church with a gable roof, confirming that if the church were built in the 1920s, its roof was replaced in the 1940s.

B. Previous Churches on the Site:

If this church were built in the 1920s, there were not previous churches in this village, as Lime Village was not founded until 1917. If this church were built in the 1940s, the previous church may have been moved from Kanillan.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The church is a simple log square with a pyramidal roof.
2. Condition of fabric: Fair.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The church measures 17'-5" on a side.
2. Foundations: Sill logs.
3. Walls: Unpeeled round logs, squarenotched at the corners.
4. Structural system: Log.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: There is a single door at the entrance. The painted circles on the door are a motif that is repeated in the interior.
 - b. Windows: Windows on two sides are double, with six-light sash.
6. Roof:
 - a. Shape, covering: The pyramidal roof is covered with corrugated metal.
 - b. Cornice, eaves: There are exposed log rafter ends.
 - c. Cupolas: The building is crowned simply by a cross.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: The chapel is one open space. Unlike most Russian Orthodox churches in Alaska, there is no iconostas, and the altar is not in a separate sanctuary. During portions of the service when the priest should not be seen by the congregation, a sheet is drawn across the nave. Icons are hung on the rear wall of the nave.
2. Stairways: none.
3. Flooring: Wide planks, whipsawn and planed.

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4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and tray ceiling are covered with a heavy construction paper. The rear wall is wallpapered.
5. Decorative features: The altar table is in the center of the room. On the east wall behind it is an assortment of framed icons, brought from the previous village.
6. Bells: Outside, there is a bellstand with one bell.

D. Site:

The church is located at the edge of the village, on a hill overlooking the river.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Alexie, Emma Bobby, interviewed by author May 29, 1990.

Ca. 1943 photograph of church, copy belonging to Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, accession number H-70.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation of SS. Constantine and Helen Russian Orthodox Church was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), a division of the National Park Service, the state of Alaska, and the Icon Preservation Task Force. The project was executed under the general direction of Robert J. Kapsch, chief of HABS/HAER, and Boyd Evison, Alaska Regional Director, National Park Service. Recording was carried out during summer 1990 by Steven M. Peterson, project director; Jet Lowe, photographer; and Alison K. Hoagland, historian, who prepared this report.

ADDENDUM TO
SS. CONSTANTINE & HELEN RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
Lime Village
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